ARTISTIC RESEARCH TRAINING IN MUSIC: PERSPECTIVES ON PEDAGOGY, HIGHER DEGREES AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

Creative artists are enrolling in research programmes in ever-greater numbers where the boundaries between professional practice, research and its outcomes increasingly take on new forms and meaning. This paper examines artistic research processes in music through the experiences of students, graduates and their academic supervisors at an Australian conservatorium of music. The authors utilise a multiple case study methodology to probe key milestones in the higher degree lifecycle in order to ascertain the efficacy of the pedagogies, processes and outcomes. Overall, the paper offers conclusions as to how these research programmes may continue to evolve in the future.

Keywords: Artistic research, music pedagogy, research training.

1 INTRODUCTION

The rise of professionally oriented research degrees has been a notable feature of the higher education sector in the last decades (Tuning, 2004) and in Australia this has been most visible in practice-led disciplines including education, nursing and jurisprudence (Brennan, 1998). Most recently, creative artists are undertaking higher degree research (HDR) programmes in burgeoning numbers where the boundaries between professional practice, research and their outcomes increasingly take on new forms and meanings – the idea of ‘artistic research’ now has currency and trajectory, and research training pedagogies continue to evolve in response to these events (Borgdorff, 2012). In music research, while this was formerly a somewhat traditional area dominated by musicology, music education or composition-as-score, here too the emergence of artistic research has caused much re-thinking about identity, measurement and definition (Coessens et al, 2009; Draper & Harrison, 2011).

As this paper will reveal, musicians have embraced these opportunities at the authors’ institution and most recently with record numbers of high quality, internationally validated completions. Yet we also believe the landscape requires a deeper understanding of this emergent discipline via a review of the salient features in relation to pedagogical approaches for the musician seeking to gain academic research credentials. As participants in a recent study suggest,

It’s about music making. We have to be really on top of all the different models of research and music making. The student’s abilities as a player or composer must improve substantially or the whole thing is a waste of time, no matter how well they write. We have this incredible duty of care to make creative output excellent. (Harrison & Dwyer, 2013, p. 4).

While it is evident that these kinds of research processes do allow for fluidity, ambiguity, uncertainty and/or discontinuity (Harrison, 2012), the question of how this research looks (and sounds) remains contentious. Overall, we seek to understand what has been achieved to date, what has worked, and what may not be working as well as it might. This frames answers to the questions: on this basis, how will these programmes continue to improve and adjust, and what forms might they take in the future?

2 LOCATING THE STUDY

This paper examines artistic research training through the experiences of supervisors, students and graduates at an Australian conservatorium of music. This institution amalgamated with a university in the 1990s with HDR-granting powers following soon after. After the traditional PhD was put in place, this was followed by the Master of Music (M.Mus) in 2000 and the Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) in 2005 – both of which sought to focus on the practice of music as the central component of the study. The extent to which research methods can be designed and delivered for these cohorts has become a major focus in recent years (Draper & Harrison, 2011; Harrison, 2012; Harrison & Emmerson, 2009).
For this project we wish to take advantage of the ‘flow through’, that is, to reflect upon the increasing rate of completions and the models of engagement they bring for analysis. In doing so we detail key milestones in the M.Mus and the DMA programmes, both of which provide supporting coursework for the research project development. Central to the enquiry are the relationships between creative products and exegetical writing – together as ‘dissertation’. Multimedia and/or ‘live’ time-based elements may often be deployed to attend to some of the display considerations for creative works. On the exegetical writing side of the equation, we also examine pertinent issues including: coursework design; reflective thinking; validity; analytical models; and the examination expectations for both artworks and text.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In 2011, this conservatorium graduated 11 DMAs and eight M.Mus projects, a record number for the institution and probably the first significant evidence of the new and rapidly evolving research culture. While numbers have stabilised at slightly lower since this time, there would appear to be patterns emerging in terms of form and function. To examine these trends more closely, in this paper we detail the progression of candidates through their programmes by using a case study methodology (Stake, 2005) to scrutinise significant stages within the HDR ‘lifecycle’. Within each of these cases we contemplate a number of indicative student projects, their journeys as early researchers, and our own development as pedagogues where the cases seek to elaborate on prior experiences and documented research. Through a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) we employ the voices and reflections of the various actors involved throughout the last five years. An overview of the participants and referencing schema is summarised in Table 1 as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th>Student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>D1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>D2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composer /performer</td>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>S3</td>
<td>D3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composer /performer</td>
<td>M.Mus</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>S4</td>
<td>M1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composer /performer</td>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>S5</td>
<td>D4</td>
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<td>Composer</td>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>S3</td>
<td>D5</td>
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<td>Composer /music technology</td>
<td>M.Mus</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>M2</td>
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<td>Music technology</td>
<td>M.Mus</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>S1</td>
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<td>DMA</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>S4</td>
<td>D6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music education</td>
<td>M.Mus</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>M4</td>
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Together our cast comprises a broad range of backgrounds, research interests and artistic profiles. In students: from jazz improvisation to contemporary record production; from opera singing to music education in schools, places of worship and beyond. Similarly for academic supervisors and teachers, they bring not only a range of professional skills to advise on writing and performance, but for some (including the authors) in terms of university administrative responsibilities for compliance with the Australian Federal government requirements for funded research training. Together, these elements provide for a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the features to be summarised, reviewed and discussed in this representative analysis of the research project lifecycle.
4 THE HDR LIFECYCLE

In both the M.Mus and the DMA, while the stages of the degree design appear quite similar, given their differing histories, we will note any differences that are evidenced as we move through the lifecycle. Application for entry begins with a proposal, but perhaps unlike many HDR processes this is not necessarily fully weighted to achievement in terms of essays or text-based knowledge examinations. For many music projects this must take account of the applicant’s musical track record and therefore a proposal may take a range of artistic attributes perhaps better described as ‘inspirational’. To this end, we therefore define each of the HDR lifecycle components in musical terms while simultaneously identifying their research purposes as follows in Fig. 1:

At key stages there are checking processes or ‘doorways’ to pass through in order to proceed. Firstly the proposal must be accepted by a panel of academic peers, then to fundamental training comprising supervisors in tandem with coursework to develop the next milestone requirement: confirmation. Where the early proposal might be more accurately described as a ‘topic’, after approximately another quarter of the lifecycle every candidate is then externally examined to verify a more fully realised design including method, literature, aims and proposed artistic materials. If and when this is ‘confirmed’, the candidate then moves on to the familiar stages of executing the design (performance), framing and completing the work (coda), and finally, submitting the overall piece and its various materials as fit for purpose to examination, corrections if required, and graduation (applause).

In what follows we move through each of these stages at a detailed level by incorporating the voices and experiences of the various actors as outline above. At every stage we linger on the unique attributes that music-making brings to the wider discussion for artistic research and higher education.
4.1 Inspiration

Admission requirements anticipate a level of professional experience: five years for the DMA, but less so for the M.Mus where a fourth year Honours degree is normally expected, together with evidence of research outputs (including creative works) and/or industry recognition. Applicants put forward a short proposal for both conservatorium and university gatekeepers to determine if the project can be resourced, and if at a given time that the people, spaces and equipment may be able see the project to fruition. Because of the proposed artistic scale for some applications, it is also centrally important to decide on whether the scope might be feasible within the timeframe, typically two years for the M.Mus and three to four years for the DMA given related governmental funding terms. There are decisions to be made about the strategic objectives of the project, but ultimately it must be reasonably established at the outset whether the project can be understood and progressed as research as per the general OECD definition:

… creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including the knowledge of man [sic], culture and society to devise new applications. (2008)

Drilling down into this further, we continue to draw on recent clarifications, including that the work must have clear potential to be

i) articulated through argument (Newberry, 2010);

ii) sharable (Borgdorff, 2007); and

iii) accessible /transparent /transferable (Mafe & Brown, 2006).

Accordingly, some relevant projects and decision-making processes are revealed as follows.

D3 came to the institution wanting to investigate his practice as a trumpeter who manipulated sound improvisations through Ableton Live computer software, the project initially entitled ‘My Laptop and Me’. While the institution found this generally feasible and attractive because of the significant existing professional profile of the applicant, there were however many concerns about the ‘new knowledge’ aspects of the project. Using the OECD definition, we were able to understand and argue the creation of this form of interactive composition as research. This has been common for some time in traditional composition PhDs with accompanying music scores, but performance of improvised ‘New Music’ is a relatively recent inclusion in research assessment. We also had to ensure that this was to be fully articulated through argument, and here we came to find autoethnography as a useful lens given the supervision of S3 as an expert in this field (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009).

Another case involves the work of M1. In a project that applies the use of Indian Carnatic music rhythms to American jazz performance, it became clear that the central research questions were to be best answered by the music itself and not through an overload of text or complex argument. For his M.Mus project, M1 also wanted to design a website as exegesis and was one of the first HDR projects to request such a pathway. At the time, university requirements prevented submission of this type given the ‘open’ nature of the Internet and the possibility of further change while under examination. However, with some consideration, planning and advocacy it has come to pass – as a direct result of M1’S innovative proposal – that broader HDR policy now includes the website format for inclusion on the proviso that it must be frozen, downloaded and submitted on disk along with the relevant paperwork. The use of such non-linear forms have since gained traction and this is now possible for all masters and doctoral candidates, and as will be elaborated upon further below.

4.2 Fundamentals

Supporting coursework begins pre-confirmation as key scaffolding. In particular, candidates are taught how to locate and frame related scholarly literature and to investigate a variety of research methodologies both in music and in allied creative arts fields. Increasingly, students are also able to draw upon high quality graduate project exemplars although transferability may be less clear at an early stage given the highly individual nature of many projects. Overall, group classes and regular HDR colloquia across all of the institution assist in establishing a sense of community support and interaction to share and discuss. However, initially it may also be common for overall judgement to be clouded by a plethora of unfamiliar intellectual considerations at the expense of musical endeavours. This can cause a disconnect, as Harrison (2013) found,

… it started to become like I was doing a PhD on methodology. I became very disconnected from my own project and very connected to learning about method. (p. 6)
Many candidates come to recognise their own ‘aural library’ as a key asset and/or begin to conduct a context scan with scope beyond the usual preconceptions for the literature review. While this can consist of existing recordings, scores, interviews and websites, it is frequently the self efficacy and acknowledgement of an internal library of music experienced by the individuals that comes to bear in terms of confidence and progressing the project (Schippers, 2007). Further, by way of support and exemplar, S2 is but one supervisor who has developed a portfolio of creative and analytical works that employ this approach (Emmerson, 2012; 2007). D3 used this concept of existing recordings in shaping the aural pallet he would present in his final folio. D4’s work also sought to combine elements from his own eclectic guitar-playing career spanning 45 years where his style incorporates elements of Jazz, Rock, Classical, Flamenco, Persian, Middle-Eastern and 20th-century compositional ideas.

As has been often discovered in this phase of the HDR lifecycle – perhaps notably different to many other disciplines, many artistic research projects are not necessarily best framed via a specific problem or research question. Rather, they more authentically seek to solve a creative dilemma where the music itself may be an answer, or that the methods themselves may not be clear until the end of the project, in fact, where methods actually may be important outcomes. For example, M2 came to us without a research question but found that she could argue her work through deep reflection on her own song writing and recording studio processes with examples of outcomes as quality, new music. Another student, D2 is investigating ‘songs of death’. On first glance this may not read as especially original, however this is contextualised through her own performance and those of others. Her design (and recent confirmation) was based on three live performances, each framed as cases with parallels drawing on literature, scores, live performances and recordings. Her artistic aim (or perhaps ‘question’) relates to her own interpretations of seminal works including Schubert’s Winterliesse and Mussorgsky’s Songs and Dances of Death. The project therefore will include both ‘live’ time-based work and recordings for analysis and evidence of emerging artistic method throughout.

4.3 Arrangement

The challenge of confirmation is to get the pitch and balance right. In the M.Mus and the DMA there are two distinct but connected aspects of this – a paper and a presentation. This process requires the candidate to argue progression into main stage of the degree, but as we have noted in earlier writing, it is difficult to predict a final outcome some two to three years out from completion – practice-led or otherwise. However, it is likely that more can be accomplished in terms of prompting candidates, supervisors and examiners as to just how portfolio-based research designs might be presented, and of a range within which the confirmation might judged. This could include music-making elements or multimedia drafts as components and/or assessment stages to better propose exegesis options within confirmation (Draper & Harrison, 2011, p. 97).

Candiates frequently describe this as being intellectually exposed, challenged, and for many, ‘feeling like a fraud’. Because many of these projects are designed by experienced and often publically acclaimed musicians, the challenge of justifying one’s practice in an intellectual setting is understandably confronting. M3 is a case in point. His work sits at the intersection of art, technology and the music industry. He argues to use his sound production experiments as a platform for reflection and debate, however, to omit the recorded representations themselves would not be useful, nor would allow the panel of expert music academics to make a judgement about the quality of the practice itself – equally as important as the intellectual arguments around it.

D6 on the other hand, presented at an earlier time (2009) when, because of our own uncertainties, the argument needed to closely reflect a traditional dissertation. His confirmation was a dynamic presentation that included images, diagrams and recorded performances of other artists. Because his work was located in the world of contemporary worship singing, there was also a dilemma in choosing an appropriate external examiner – a theologian, a singer, a liturgist? Ultimately the latter was chosen and while D6 passed confirmation, now wise in hindsight, the use of a practitioner as examiner may have been a more logical choice.

Overall the institution now provides a better match between confirmation examiners and projects, and especially as more candidates graduate with compelling stories around their own music. Much may be considered ground-breaking in shape and intent, yet it would appear that many have achieved this despite the university in the first instance. What is clear from recent history, is that important early support milestones continue to respond and evolve, and overall, that the music itself take its central and highly visible place alongside the equally important argument for art-as-research.
4.4 Performance

What follows confirmation may be in some cases, a slump. The effort required in obtaining approval from the institution and the relief at passing this hurdle sometimes puts the project proper on hold for some months (often locally referred to as ‘post-confirmal depression’). For professional musicians, their working commitments continue to impact as the project evolves. While some practitioners like D3 and M1 are able to combine reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) as an integrated artistic research process, others may find that the documentation either inhibits the music-making or cannot take place simultaneously alongside the artistic processes. In some cases ‘write-up’ may need to be postponed until later in the project lifecycle.

In the case of M4 he had busy full time employment as a jazz educator at a high school, also the topic of his M.Mus dissertation. Together with a lack of experience in research and without a highly systematised structure this project may have had difficulty via the usual academic supervision means. As per explicit planning with S1 however, the M.Mus structure provided the framework to keep the project on track via face to face performance seminars throughout where each of these were explicitly connected to the arrangement argued at confirmation. Similarly, while M1’s web-based projects led to a more integrated approach at submission, S4 performed a key role in the advice around performance opportunities and the sequencing made possible through highly visible events within the M.Mus structure. By contrast in the DMA, for D2, the act of singing requires physical preparation that demands slots of time allocated to working on the songs technically, musically and psychologically. Notes can be kept throughout the process but the write-up of these into cogent arguments can only take place once the performance has concluded. Presently in the DMA structure, there is no real capacity to take all of this into account and so becomes a very private endeavour.

All of which points to some of the significant differences between the M.Mus and the DMA now timely to briefly note here. Created at an earlier time (2000), the M.Mus originally had a core focus on high level performance training and to this day retains the option for a secondary supervisor to provide advanced musical lessons. This feature is not present in the DMA which at the time that it was created (2005), it would have been unusual to include such lessons in a doctoral award. Furthermore, the Federal government and university HDR funding arrangements require that i) any coursework (including music lessons) not occupy more than 30% of the total of any research program, the major balance being that of the ‘dissertation’ (based on the traditional PhD conception), and that ii) all HDR awards be examined in full and only at the end of candidature as a final, single submission. Clearly some of this presents challenges and disconnects with the research landscape elaborated thus far, but of note, it may be the M.Mus that provides innovative possibilities as to a way forward. These matters will be examined more fully in the closing sections of this paper.

Blended learning and multimedia tools have had impact in some projects, both directly and indirectly (Draper & Harrison, 2011). The BlackBoard content management system provides resources, videos and exemplars for all candidates independently of candidate location, workplace or touring commitments. More recently, an institutional-wide learning organisation coined HDRs @ The Con was commissioned and designed to provide a permanent record of much research activity, VIP presentations and ‘behind the music’ events via iTunes subscription (Hitchcock & Draper, 2011). The resource also allows for regular ‘virtual colloquia’ where students and staff may attend in person or log-in to participate though a variety of means including Skype or chat-like interfaces. At the individual level, while there are coursework electives which provide training for video editing, web design, sound recording and the like, uptake has been relatively low perhaps because of the early to mid-candidature staging of these elements. Conversely it would seem that in one way or another, candidates do indeed make full use of a range of multimedia representation options in their final submissions, but often quite late in the piece via a ‘just in time’ methodology by drawing upon informal networks as required (Draper & Cunio, 2013). This will be further discussed in the following sections.

4.5 Coda

Candidates frequently experience difficulty in judging when a project is done. Unsurprisingly, students fall into two camps: those who think they’re done when they’re not, and those who can’t let go. As Geoffrey Webb, Creative Director of Walmart’s Leadership Academy insightfully notes,

Knowing when to stop is the hallmark of a great artist. Whether you’re painting a picture, seasoning a dish, or writing a story, knowing when to stop can mean the difference between a masterpiece and a mess. (2011, n.p.)
It is here therefore that the academic supervisors have a central role to play (and also aware that the funding timespan is finite). Ultimately, they have the final responsibility for knowing and advising when it is ready, but of course in the case of the arts these may be highly idiosyncratic and personalised matters. D5’s work for example focussed on the interface of Asperger’s syndrome and music. For him, there was no end to this struggle – it was work in progress and all he could attempt to do was document and point to possible ways in which the syndrome and music might interact. Similar exploratory studies do not necessarily provide solutions but raise questions for further research, and early career academics this provides the impetus of a post-doctoral career phase. For professional artists, this could be the inspiration for the next iteration of a new work, or a new work altogether.

To sum up, overarching considerations include:

• has the student done enough to submit for examination?
• how does this project increase the stock of knowledge?
• is it trustworthy, compelling and fit for purpose?

In most cases it becomes clear that the overall quality of exegetical writing, argument and personal vision has much to with this. First person writing, coherent reflective methodologies and related data representation together with innovative representations through multimedia and/or high level musical practice are all part of a mix which should present a project outcome greater than the sum of its parts.

As discussed above, the submission must take place at the end-point of the process and as yet there is no capacity for lock-step assessment throughout the DMA lifecycle in particular – all of which presents yet further considerations as to ‘when it is ready’. Performers such as D1 found this to be problematic because the number of new works she wanted to perform over time could not be presented at an end-point. Similarly, D2 has presented and recorded performances throughout the degree while simultaneously documenting the process. For non-linear web-based submissions, such as D5 and M1, the problem was when exactly to seal off the website for submission and examination.

In addition, institutions face the difficult prospect of locating informed examiners who bring an understanding of the process. In D5 and other similar cases, a section on ‘how to read me’ is included to assist with exactly this. The framing of the doctoral submission can be complex, but overall this aims to set up an exact argument as to how the work should be judged. Two other minor concerns relate to: the technical considerations and logistics of live performance and digital submission; and, the adjudication of disparate marks post-examination. These have been dealt with more thoroughly in Harrison (2013) but suffice to note here that clear instructions and criteria for assessment are paramount to avoid candidates facing the prospect of failure after several years of work.

4.6 Applause?

The examination process itself typically relies on submissions of three types:

i) text-based dissertation;
ii) performed or composed music, plus written exegesis;
iii) integrated digital presentation of media, music, text, images.

This presents a variety of arrangements for examination. In the case of i) and iii) these may be bundled and distributed to external international examiners as per convention. In the case of a project that argues the need for live performance, in some cases a digital proxy may part-substitute. In other cases, it may be critically important that works as research outcomes must be experienced in real time, with examination as part of a ‘live’ audience.

To aid in all of this, we have witnessed the growth and enculturation of a so-called ‘defence’ right of passage when candidates pitch their final project to colleagues and candidates at various pre-arranged opportunities. Most recently, there have been regular mid-year and end of year ‘research festivals’ which now attract increasing numbers of Australian and international visitors. By clustering such events as confirmations, defence examinations and VIP presentations (similar to that of a conference), to some degree the tyranny of distance is alleviated by aggregating and promoting critical mass. This also allows for international examination of live performance events, the costs for which could be otherwise prohibitive on a one-off basis.
5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the preceding examination of the HDR lifecycle we have attended to a somewhat forensic examination of key events and insights related to the recent proliferation of HDR completions. It is a little clearer as a body of work what some of the central considerations for the future might be, and to this end we now proceed to a summary of what we posit for future refinements.

5.1 Preparation

The responsibility for admission largely lies with the institution who should be well placed to make judgement on the possibility of the eventual success of the proposed project. Auditions, portfolios and interviews are typically used to ascertain a candidate’s suitability for the proposed course of study and the way forward appears to be exercising greater discernment at this juncture in order to maximise success later in the program. To this end, while progression through this first ‘doorway’ requires knowledge of both local and higher education sector policy – it is also clear that an acknowledgement of the collective wisdom of the teams who will be responsible for administering and supervising the project is key to making a ‘best bet’ on applications which continue to fall outside the bureaucratic assumptions for HDR research proposals. It is also the case for artistic research in music, that not only must proposals present a convincing intellectual case, but also that the track record of the applicant as a high level, active musician is central to a project which aims to complete on a world stage.

5.2 Programmes

DMA course work was initially envisioned as preparation for confirmation, with the on-going framework largely serving candidates and supervisors to achieve a final outcome. While there are possibilities for musical milestones in the middle ‘Performance’ phase of the project, these are attended to on an ad hoc basis. By contrast, the M.Mus makes use of a coursework structure that runs parallel to the major dissertation across the entire life of the program. To a large extent this followed from the music lesson-oriented underpinnings of the original design, intending to provide a vehicle for performances and audiences while the larger research project continued independently with the dissertation supervisor. Over time however, it is exactly these courses that have provided for continuing assessment, development of time-based projects, and formal opportunities to record, reflect and incorporate representations of these events as portfolio for the final exegesis. Moreover, papers (or thesis chapters) are submitted for review along the way, the net effect greatly alleviating the slump that many others experience post-confirmation. In short, the regular, semesterised coursework keeps the project moving and on-track, to be then framed in the final write-up and/or performance where applicable.

It may be that all conservatorium HDR programmes will draw ever closer together in the future, by taking on common successful elements in order to allow for a more refined and deliberative artistic research continuum (perhaps similarly to that which now exists in the traditional relationship between the M.Phil and the PhD). Given some of the difficulties experienced by DMA candidates as explored above in this paper, the M.Mus may have much to offer in terms of overall scaffolding and milestones. Similarly, there are additional considerations for an independent but related enquiry into undergraduate with Honours programs that also form part of the overall artistic research training mix (Draper and Hitchcock, 2013).

5.3 Just in time

When the M.Mus and the DMA were first created, early coursework was based on a relatively traditional conception of research training, that is: via a sequence of courses that progressively worked though generalist approaches to framing a research proposal, conducting a literature review, developing research questions and arguing research methodologies via exposure to a smorgasbord of examples and related assessment items. To some degree this approach remains in keeping with institutional aims that HDR graduates should posses a higher order view of research forms and functions, however, it is the overall sequencing of the various elements that now attracts the greatest scrutiny and reflection. Via on-going reviews of candidate’s insights (both here and elsewhere over time) it has become clearer that the provision of certain information too soon may indeed steer the project off track, “…like I was doing a PhD on methodology” (Harrison, 2013, p. 6). As outlined in this paper, authentic trajectories often include: (artistic) methods as outcomes to effectively turn traditional research sequencing upside-down; research questions better framed as artistic aims or creative ‘products; and/or literature reviews which include a personal repertoire of musical memes as well as broader context scans of musical scores, sound recordings and other performances for example.
Most recently therefore we move closer to a process whereby the projects themselves aim to drive the content and delivery of appropriate resources over time as the elements coalesce. While pre-confirmation coursework continues to focus on unpacking and revealing the core attributes of the individual project via seminars and peer review of both written and creative work, there is increasingly an emerging ‘just in time’ sensibility where specific tools are deployed as best fit for purpose at much later stages than was previously envisioned (Draper & Cunio, 2013). Similarly, via academic reflection and from the experiences of the graduates themselves, this better locates the design of portfolio structures, multimedia submission formats and other exegetical considerations to the very final stages of the project. In sum, successive years of delivering early ‘ology’ overload is now progressing to encourage a more reflexive alignment between ontology, epistemology and methodology as they apply to individualised project development across the entire HDR lifecycle.

6 CONCLUSION

At the time of writing, one of the more significant issues facing the higher education sector in this country is the introduction of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) which has the potential to impose a further set of systematised structures and restrictions on all degree programmes. The full impact of the AQF is yet to be determined, but suffice it to say that left to instrumental mechanisms and/or through lack of advocacy or exemplars, by 2015 all music programmes could look very different should they need to reflect a centralised view of higher degree research. We believe that some of our work here and that of our graduates may contribute to the debate through the scrutiny of the key outcomes to date – and/or at the very least a deeper understanding will assist in interpretation of the AQF requirements and in the formulation of useful strategic responses.

Thus, both new notions of artistic research together with familiar calls for massification of higher education undoubtedly present challenges for HDR training in music. As we have noted elsewhere (Harrison, 2013; Draper & Harrison, 2011), a masters or doctoral degree in music would at first glance not appear to make significant differences to individual employment opportunities or for society more broadly if one considers this in purely mechanistic terms, as ‘doing’, as a ‘qualification’. However, it is also clear that the re-thinking of identity, measurement and definition has been embraced by graduates to empower their music-making and impact in their personal and artistic lives well beyond the confines of coursework, dissertation or institution. While some graduates have taken employment in academic roles across the world, for most they continue to expand their musical reach and public impact, albeit with the imprimatur of a higher research degree where this reveals – most importantly to the graduates themselves – just how powerful and central to practice itself is the philosophy, vision and embodied knowledge in their thinking ‘behind the music’.

REFERENCES


